

EXHIBIT 15

Whole Foods workers sent home for wearing Black Lives Matter masks

By **Katie Johnston** Globe Staff, Updated June 25, 2020, 6:08 p.m.



Workers were sent home from the River Street Whole Foods in Cambridge for wearing Black Lives Matter masks.

When you click on the Whole Foods corporate website, the first thing you see are the words, [“Racism has no place here.”](#) But neither, apparently, do Black Lives Matter face masks.

After seeing reports of Whole Foods workers in other states being sent home for refusing to take off Black Lives Matter face masks, Savannah Kinzer decided to bring the

movement to Cambridge. And, sure enough, when she and her colleagues put on masks emblazoned with the phrase Wednesday afternoon, the manager told them they either had to remove the masks or go home. So seven of them walked out.

On Thursday, Kinzer showed up for her 11 a.m. shift and passed out more masks. And once again, she was sent home, along with at least a dozen others.

Employees at the River Street store are part of a wave of workers trying to spread the Black Lives Matter message and encountering resistance from major companies that have publicly disavowed racism.

Whole Foods workers in [Bedford, N.H.](#), [Philadelphia](#), and [Seattle](#) have been sent home for wearing masks bearing the phrase, as has a [Publix](#) employee in Fort Myers, Fla. A [Taco Bell](#) employee in Youngstown, Ohio, posted a video that went viral about being fired for wearing a mask with the slogan, prompting the company to state that it does not prohibit such merchandise and that it believes the “Black Lives Matter movement is a human rights issue and not a political one.”

After [Starbucks](#) banned the attire, and faced a backlash, the company announced it would allow it — and started printing shirts for workers to wear supporting the movement.

Earlier this month, Amazon, which owns Whole Foods, said it would [donate \\$10 million](#) to organizations dedicated to racial justice, and chief executive Jeff Bezos [posted a letter](#) on social media from a customer attacking the company’s support for Black Lives Matter, replying: “You’re the kind of customer I’m happy to lose.”

Yet managers at the Cambridge store told employees that they couldn’t wear Black Lives Matter masks because they weren’t part of the dress code. This despite the fact that Patriots masks, and a mask Kinzer wore earlier this week that said, “Soup is good,” went unchallenged, Kinzer said. (On Thursday, Kinzer said, workers were told to remove masks with Red Sox and Narragansett logos.)

In a statement, Whole Foods said, “In a customer-focused environment, all Team Members must comply with our longstanding company dress code, which prohibits clothing with visible slogans, messages, logos or advertising that are not company-related. Team Members who do not comply with dress code are always given the opportunity to comply. If a Team Member is wearing a face mask that is outside of dress code, they are offered a new face mask. Team Members are not able to work until they comply with the policy.”

Kinzer, 23, a recent Northeastern University graduate who started working as an Amazon Prime shopper at Whole Foods in April, hoped the masks would make the company back up its words with actions. She created fliers to spread the word about the movement — noting, “We are normalizing the BLM statement not just for the company but for each individual that walks through our store’s doors” — and is hoping for a major showing on Tuesday, when most workers are in the store.

“We can’t just put a label on this and say we care and not let our own workers wear stuff in support of the movement,” said Kinzer, who is white, noting that Whole Foods just announced it was creating an inclusion task force and is temporarily matching employee donations to racial justice causes. “Until we see it as a white person’s problem and not a Black issue that white people have to empathize with, racism will persist.”

When businesses take a stance against racism, it doesn’t make sense to keep their employees from making the same argument, said Dan Cence, chief executive of the Boston public relations firm Solomon Mccown & Cence.

“Why would you not let individuals who agree with you express it themselves?” he said. “Businesses can’t rely on the old Michael Jordan adage: take no stance because ‘Republicans buy sneakers too.’ ”

Leavar Michel, another Prime shopper at the Cambridge store, was among those sent home for wearing a Black Lives Matter mask on Thursday. Michel 10 said that most of

home for wearing a Black Lives Matter mask on Thursday. Michel, 19, said that most of the managers at the store are white, while the employees he sees when he starts his shift at 6 a.m. are almost all people of color. Michel, who is Black, is thrilled that a white woman is leading the charge.

“It makes it easier for us, personally, to fight and really say what we want because we know that we have support from other races,” he said.

Still, some employees are afraid to wear the Black Lives Matter masks for fear of losing the income they need to pay for college or support their families, said Michel, who also works as an independent stock trader.

“Employers understand what power they have because of the lack of jobs available, and I think they’re using that to force people to not spread the message to avoid offending customers,” he said. “It’s not like we’re rioting or doing anything. We’re wearing masks.”

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